

Tracts A. 355. (1)



ON THE QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP IN  
"ACADEMICAL DISSERTATIONS."



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ON THE QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP IN  
“ACADEMICAL DISSERTATIONS.”

**T**HE subject on which I wish to make a few tentative remarks is surrounded by some difficulties. It is one on which literary doctors disagree: the authorship of *Academical Dissertations*. These learned essays, the use of which (with the exception of France, and in some measure Germany) seems to have considerably decreased in the academic curricula of nations, form a very large class

in a scientific library, and, with regard to a great proportion of them, one cannot but feel, give more trouble, and occupy more time in their cataloguing and arrangement than their value always merits ; but, at the same time, as scattered among them there are treatises which have since become noted as important essays of their time on the subjects of which they treat, and as the ordinary cataloguer or librarian cannot be supposed to have the proper judgment and ability for selection among them, the careful noting of them all is the only mode which can be adopted.

In the "title-taking" of these dissertations the difficulty is not in their "subjects," which are sometimes confined even to a single word, but it is in the choice of their authors' names : whether the præses, the respondent, the proponent or defendant is

to be chosen. It may perhaps be thought that I am fighting with a shadow, but when it is considered that the seventh of the "Rules for Cataloguing" printed by the British Museum, copied afterwards into Cutter's Rules, and since, I find, adopted by our Association, is that "The Respondent or Defendant of a Thesis is the Author, except when it unequivocally appears to be the work of the Præses," and that nevertheless in some special catalogues, such as Pritzel's Thesaurus, Haller's Bibliothecæ, &c., and in the catalogues of the Linnæan, and some other Societies' libraries, the rule has been generally adopted that the præses is the author, or at least that he takes that position from the dissertations being entered under his name—and that in a large number of collections of these dissertations, this latter

rule has been frequently favoured—it will be allowed that this shadow puts on a substantial appearance, and has sufficient reality in it to bear a practical discussion. In placing before you some examples from title-pages, in illustration of the question, I must apologize for taking them entirely from works connected with Medicine and its allied sciences, as being the class more immediately ready to my hand for reference.

Before entering on the bibliographical part of our subject, you will allow me to quote from “Watts on the Improvement of the Mind” a short summary of the method of scholastic disputation: “The tutor appoints a question in some of the sciences to be debated amongst his students; one of them undertakes to affirm or to deny the question and to



defend his assertion or negation, and to answer all objections against it; he is called the *respondent*, and the rest of the students in the same class or who pursue the same science are the *opponents*, who are appointed to dispute or raise objections against the proposition affirmed or denied. It is the business of the respondent to write a thesis in Latin, or short discourse on the question proposed, and he either affirms or denies the question according to the opinion of the tutor, which is supposed to be the truth, and he reads it at the beginning of the dispute. The opponent, or opponents in succession, make objections in the form of a syllogism, the proposition in which is in reply argued against and denied by the respondent. During this time the tutor sits in the chair as President or Moderator

to see that the rules of disputation and decency be observed on both sides. His work is also to illustrate and explain the answer or distinction of the respondent where it is obscure, to strengthen it where it is weak, and to correct it where it is false, and when the respondent is pinched with a strong objection, and is at a loss for an answer, the Moderator assists him and suggests some answer to the objection of the opponent, in defence of the question according to his own opinion or sentiment."

The latter part of the above quotation seems to be the only ground for attributing an authorship to the præses, viz., that he has had so great a hand in correcting and moulding the form and argument of the essay as to be entitled to the appellation. I cannot understand the thesis

being attributed to the præses on any other supposition, but if that supposition be correct, and the præses did give the candidate the information on which his dissertation is compiled, and the candidate had merely the superficial reality of the position as a defender of the statements given in his thesis, would not that circumstance be purely a literary question and a matter for a statement by foot-note? while, as the candidate for honours brings the thesis forward as his own he must bibliographically be considered its author.

The questions also arise: is the published thesis the original thesis prepared for disputation, or is it in its printed form a combination of that thesis with such corrections and emendations as have been elicited in the discussion? Is it like a paper contributed to our societies, in

which the *ipsissima verba* of the author are retained if the paper is thought generally worthy of publication, in despite of some of its statements having been contravened in the discussion? Is it like a drafted Bill for Parliament, or as amended in committee or by a rival committee, with the chairman's notes of addition and correction? Might not the authorship, if conceded to the præses on these grounds, be given also to a schoolmaster who suggested some of the principal points of the themes for his pupils on which they were to gain honour and distinction; or to a drawing-master, who

“ In years gone by, when we were lads at school,”

put some last brilliant touches to our dull, spiritless attempts at imitation; rendering our pencillings liable, in their improved

condition, to be declared by some cynical critic, much to our dissatisfaction, more our master's than our own.

In the "Dissertationes Inaugurales" of the Edinburgh, Leipzig, Goettingen, Berlin, Paris and other universities, there is little or no difficulty, where the author, A. B. *eruditorum examini subjicit, ex auctoritate Rectoris vel Præfecti*, as, if we take, for instance, the case of the Edinburgh Dissertations, no one could suppose the hundreds of dissertations submitted for examination by aspirants for academic honours could all be attributed, either to the learned Præfects Drs. Wishart or Wm. Robertson of the last century, or to Dr. Georgius Baird of the first quarter of the present; and one of the difficulties connected with the question is, how far the usual præses in theses with a respon-

dent, is or is not in almost the same relative position as the rector of the above dissertations, and in fact whether the hundred and one different forms and variations of words on title-pages used in the various cases of rector and candidate for honours, præses and proponent, præses and defendant, defendant alone, præses and respondent, respondent alone, &c., are not all slightly varying representations of much the same condition of things, modified perhaps by some variety of usages, as in Sweden, for instance, which may have been more favourable to the claims of the præses than in other countries; a condition, however, which is a veritable Proteus in its many changes of shape.

Presidents, we allow to be absolute in their decisions, but in the case of these dissertations they are in an "ablative ab-

solute" position, and therefore, I suggest, should, with few exceptions, be removed from the status of author, which belongs grammatically as well as bibliographically to the proponent, defendant, or respondent, who in the nominative case dominates the entire construction of the title-page.

The British Museum rule, as adopted by Mr. Cutter in his "Rules for a Dictionary Catalogue" and by our Association since, viz., "*Consider the Respondent or Defendant of a Thesis as its Author except when it unequivocally appears to be the work of the Præses*," does not comprehend cases where both the words respondent and defendant occur together.

The respondent is the author when words like *auctor respondens* are attached to his name, or when the præses is the only other name mentioned on the title,

but not when there is a proponent or defendant, as in the following out of many instances I could produce :—

“De Mangano : Dissertatio quam publice *defendere* studebit G. Forchhammer, *respondente* Tho. G. Repp ;” Hafniæ, 1820, 4to. “Dissertatio Medica quam auspiciis Rectoris Friderici Hassiæ Landgravii *defendet* P. J. Borellus, *respondente* H. G. Sibeckero.”

I should like, therefore, to have added to that rule, “The Defendant or Respondent is the Author when either occurs separately on the title-page, but when together, the Defendant must be so considered.”

In Cutter’s rules for cross-referencing, he considers that one should be made from the præses to the respondent or defendant of a thesis, which I cannot but consider supererogatory ; the contrary one,



from respondent to præses, where the præses can be proved to be the author, has more reason in its favour.

This latter case is, however, of comparatively rare occurrence, the following being examples of those few cases in which the authorship must be given to him :—

“*Dissertatio quam sistit præses G. F. Francus de Frankenau, respondente Daniel Wagnero*”; Hafniæ, 1704, the dedication being also signed by Francus. “*De Humoribus disputatio, authore ac præside D. C. Lucio et respondente M. Rotmundo*,” Ingolstadii, 1588.

In what way, favourable or unfavourable to the præses-author hypothesis, shall we take such titles as—

Deo triuno præside ex decreto gratiosi Med. Ordinis.

Quam deo ter optimo maximo Præsiede  
ex auctoritate D. Rectoris exam. subjicit  
J. G. W.

Quam præside summo numine ex auc-  
toritate D. Rectoris subjicit J. G. W.

When the præses is the author he is usually called author, defendant, or proponent, never respondent, but the opposing respondent is sometimes a participating author.

The following case is one of our difficulties and shows the necessity of looking further than the title :—

“*Dissertatio de Hæmorrhoidibus, præses Geo. Francus, respondens J. G. Carisius,*”  
Heidelb. 1672.

The dedication to this is signed by Francus, with this remark “*Dissertationem Medicam primitias nempe meas offerre debui,*” proving him to be the author.

And in numerous cases where the names of a præses and respondent occur on the title without the word author being attached to either, the preface or dedication is signed sometimes by one and sometimes by the other, and the authorship must be attributed accordingly.

But with regard to those Disputations in which only the names of præses and respondent occur on the title, we must recollect that the antithesis is not always between *them*, but between the *opponents*, whether mentioned or not, and the *author* who responds to their strictures, the præses being only the arbiter between them.

The principal cause of our troubles in these matters is not, however, to be found so much in the separate dissertations in their original publication, as in the collected editions of them by Haller and

others. In these collections the name of the præses is constantly given as author of the thesis in the heading lines of the text, even when the title, in agreement with its original publication, attaches the word *auctor* to the name of the defendant or respondent ; are we in these cases to suppose that these heading lines have really been left to the caprice of the printer, who has adopted the name of the præses as occurring first on the title, on the principle of first come first served ?

In Haller's Collection of " Disputationes Chirurgicæ " contrarieties constantly occur, the exact sameness of construction in the titles being followed sometimes by the name of the præses and sometimes by that of the defendant, on the heading lines of the text ; as, for instance, in one where, though the fly title mentions Orth

as the "*respondens auctor*," the dissertation is in the heading placed under the name of Salzmann, the præses.

Other instances of this difficulty occur in Gruner's "Delectus Dissertationum Medicarum Jenensium," in which a large number are attributed to the præses Baldinger, in a title-construction which mentions the names of the proponents as authors. In Haller's "Disputationes ad Morborum historiam," the regular titles are omitted, and the two names, sometimes præses and respondent, sometimes respondent and opponent, or defendant and respondent, are given coupled by an *et* as the authors of the dissertation, the first name, however, gaining the honour of the heading line. I give one or two instances exhibiting the confusion involved in the question.

*J. V. Scheid et Marci Mappi Disputatio de duobus ossiculis in cerebro humano mulieris*, 1687. Scheid's name appears as the author in the heading line, but on turning to the original edition I find *pro disputatione proposita, præside J. V. Scheid, respondente Marco Mappo*, and in the dedication signed by Mappus it is stated by him to be his first specimen of his medical studies.

In another instance of the same kind, *Joh. Saltzmann et E. C. Honold de Vermeraribus excusso*, the heading line has Saltzmann as the author, while in the original edition the dedication to the magistracy of his native town is signed by Honold, as dedicating to them *primitias hasce academicas*, and at the end are several letters and sets of congratulatory verses on his performance. How in a bibliographical

sense can Scheid or Saltzmann be the authors of these theses? The information they may have contributed as teachers does not constitute them authors. Cases of the same kind occur in "Richteri Opuscula Medica, studio J. C. G. Ackermann," 1780; in "Trilleri Opuscula," and in "J. G. Roedereri Opuscula Medica," in which latter are included dissertations which are said to be *totæ ab illo factæ*, which yet on their titles have *quam publico eruditorum examini submittit*—Dietz, Winiker, Hirschfeld, Stein, Schael, Chüden, Zeis, and some with the word *auctor* prefixed to the proponent, and without the name of Roederer on the title at all, which yet are said in the table of contents to be *illo non plane auctore sed suasore et moderatore enatæ*.

There is a series of thirteen "*Disputationes de recta ratione Purgandi, a Mel.*

*chione Sebizio*," 1621, which are printed as by Sebizius, but in each of the disputations the dedication is signed by the respondent, and the respondents speak of the theses as the first fruits of their studies.

There are, indeed, so many of these dissertations in which the construction of the title is the same whether a *præses* is mentioned or not, and with the word *auctor* sometimes following the name of the defendant, sometimes that of the respondent, that there can be little doubt that one of the latter must be considered the author, in all cases where *auctor* does not follow the name of the *præses*.

When a collection of theses or dissertations is published under the name of a *præses* as his *opera*, such as in the case of Sebizius, Richter, Roederer and others, it is merely in a secondary sense from his



having contributed opinions and corrections to them ; and may there not also, in this publication of sets of theses under the name of the præses as his works, be some little display of bibliopolic art, as insuring a better sale if the name of an important professor of the place be attached to them than with those of yet obscure students bringing forth their first displays of knowledge before the academic world ?

And though I feel great objections to their being considered as authors bibliographically speaking, yet with regard to Linnæus, Thunberg, and some other Swedish authors, they really seem to have had so very much to do with the composition of the theses, at the disputations on which they sat as presidents, that I feel great difficulty in comprehending them in the previous category.

From these collections of dissertations it seems impossible to form any bibliographical conclusions as a basis for certainty of arrangement, but I will add from the previous statements a few suggestions which may tend towards that end :—

That the proponent is always the author of a dissertation.

That the defendant is always the author of a dissertation when it occurs with another name as respondent.

That the term defendant is, when alone, synonymous with respondent.

That when the respondent's name occurs with a præses only, the respondent is the author except words are attached to the president's name affirming him to be the proponent, defendant, or author, or there is evidence in the preface or dedication that he claims the authorship.

That the respondent when he is the author is frequently described as auctor respondens.

That the opponent is never the author of a thesis.

That dissertatio, disputatio, thesis, &c., are generally used synonymously, the same construction of words as to the authorship following each.

And that when a collection of theses or dissertations is published under the name of a præses as his "opera" it is merely in a secondary literary sense, viz., his having contributed opinions and corrections to the theses, or as being their editor.

That the adoption of an asterisk in catalogues to denote an academical dissertation or thesis relieves us of the necessity of repeating a large amount of redundant wording to each title. It has

been used successfully in our own library,  
and by Dr. Billings in his most valuable  
Index-Catalogue of the Surgeon-General's  
Library of the United States.



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